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ABSTRACT

This digest examines the problem of child labor and education in India and other Southeast Asian countries. It offers novel insights into the extent of child labor and the shortcomings and inertia of educational systems in adapting to the needs of working children. Also, the digest describes a series of promising educational innovations meant to bring education within the reach of working children and youth. Particular attention is given to the condition of the female working child. Innovative strategies that are discussed include India's Institute of Psychological and Educational Research, Self-Employed Women's Association, the voluntary agency named Chetna Vikas, the Indian Institute of Education, a crafts project in Madhya Pradesh, and the Indian Institute of Rural Workers. Thailand's mobile school, Malaysia's on-the-job training, and Bangladesh's educational program for under-privileged children are also discussed. It is concluded that the record of achievement in the field of education in South Asia is not impressive, except in the cases of Thailand and Sri Lanka. Powerful vested interests, whether in semi-feudal agriculture or unorganized industry, continue their severe exploitation by actively recruiting child labor in a perpetual quest for profit. State intervention is needed to achieve the goal of universal primary education. (RH)

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Digest 28

Child Labour and Education

Issues Emerging from the Experiences
of Some Developing Countries of Asia

by

Neera Burra

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paris
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PREFACE

One of the main factors that account for the situation of working children is their lack of education. For many children and youth working in factories or in the street, schools belong to another world; few have ever been in touch with any educational institution, and those who do start primary school often drop out before finishing it. These children tend to be poorly motivated, brought up in an illiterate family environment, not used to the discipline required at school, and their struggle to earn money leaves them neither the time nor the energy to attend regular classes. Very few formal school systems have so far attempted to reach out to these children, and to reconcile the provision of educational services with the harsh reality of child labour. Appropriate forms of education, however, which provide the basic knowledge of how to read, write and count along with practical skills needed in the labour market are one of the key premises on which to improve the lot of working children in the long run.

This **Digest** examines the problem of child labour and education in India and other South-East Asian countries. It gives some remarkable insights into the extent of child labour and the shortcomings and inertia of educational systems in adapting to the needs of these children. At the same time, it describes a series of promising educational innovations meant to bring education within the reach of working children and youth.

We are indebted to the author of this **Digest**, Ms. **Neera Burra**, whose research and advocacy concerning the problems of child labour in India have made her one of the leading specialists in this field.

Paris, May 1989

Ute Meir
Unit for Co-operation
with UNICEF and WFP

Introduction

Studies on the universalization of primary education have tended to neglect the problem of child labour. Research in the field of child labour has tended to concentrate upon the deleterious effects it has on children's health and growth as well as the exploitative conditions of work. These two subject areas have been compartmentalized and separated from each other in the organization of government departments as also in the operations of international agencies. This digest is a modest attempt to bring the streams of education and child labour together by looking at the inter-connections between the two. Since this researcher's background and experience has been in the area of child labour, it is from that angle that the sphere of education has been looked at. It is hoped that what follows will be of use to the reader both by way of offering an overall perspective as also by way of formulating practical strategies to bring education to working children. I have sought in particular to draw attention to the situations of specific groups in different societies in whose cases the problems of both child labour and education are most acute; often, such groups are forgotten in discussions at the macro-level of policy and performance.

The digest has sections on India, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The selection of countries has been to some extent arbitrary: I have personal experience of India; there were opportunities to visit Thailand, and I had access to published material on both child labour and education in respect of all the countries covered. Though the situation of working children in countries like Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, to name but a few, is at least as bad as in India, the absence of published data led to their exclusion. Even though the digest is not comprehensive, one hopes that it contains sufficiently varied fare and reflects the enormous diversity of circumstances that different Asian countries face.

In the literature, it is conventional to distinguish between three categories of children: child labour, working children and street children. Child labour has usually been defined to refer to children who work for those other

than their families and normally for a wage; working children are taken to mean those who work as part of family labour, and street children are those who work in semi-urban and urban centres and live either in their employers' premises or, literally, on the streets. These distinctions, useful for analytical purposes, are not always replicated in reality and there is frequent overlap amongst the categories. Different countries define child labour in different ways with differing criteria of age, and it is therefore important to consider the available statistics in the light of the definitions employed. In one sense, a quest for precision in numbers is futile; in another sense, one must be alive to attempts to underestimate the magnitude of the problem. The point of this peroration is only to emphasize the variety of definitional problems and their consequential pitfalls.

Data for this study have been culled almost entirely from secondary sources: publications of governments and international agencies, research efforts of non-governmental organizations and even some unpublished reports I had access to. It is only in the case of India that library work was supplemented by field work and personal experience.

The authenticity and quality of the data with respect to child labour and education in different Asian countries have to be assessed with a certain degree of skepticism. In many countries of the region, the prevalence of child labour is often denied by authorities or if recognized, its magnitude severely underestimated. Restrictive definitions of child labour minimized the size of the problem and with limited public awareness, countervailing views did not gain prominence. With respect to education, the functionaries of governments had a vested interest in magnifying success. Imperfect systems of data collection added to the distortion of facts and figures. Non-governmental organizations and independent researchers offered correctives with their micro studies. In India, for example, a healthy public debate over the issue of child labour was generated about four years ago. It is one's experience of the Indian context that has led one to view with caution the version of events propagated by governments, both in the areas of child labour and education. If underestimation is the rule in the former, overestimation is the norm in the latter. A critical but judicious

assessment of different views of the problem is called for if one wishes to measure reality. Such a spirit of doubt should inform the observer interested in knowing what is happening in fact.

The digest has been arranged in sections: after the country reports, there is a discussion of the problems of the female working child, and this is followed by a discussion of innovative strategies. In conclusion, we have sought to draw together the different strands running through this study to provide a perspective for policy and action.

While writing this digest, several people gave me assistance and guidance. In particular, I would like to thank those in the offices of Unesco and UNICEF in Bangkok, who gave me a wealth of documentation. Jay Ratnaik of Unesco in Bangkok gave me time and shared his experiences and ideas freely, for which I am grateful. Needless to say, the views expressed in this digest are those of the author and not those of the Organization which sponsored it.

My thanks are also due to Unesco which commissioned me to prepare this digest.

Neera Burra
New Delhi, India

INDIA

In this section, we will look at the legal and policy frame of the Indian State as regards child labour and education. This is followed by a critical appraisal of official data on the numbers of children working and the figures for children within and outside the school system. The shortcomings of the school system in the context of rural, agricultural society are then discussed. Case studies of different industries in which children are employed are then presented for what they tell of the view from below : of the parents of working children. Apart from these case-studies, reference is made to other published material to demonstrate the links between the perpetuation of illiteracy and the maintenance of vested interests.

The legal frame and working children

Article 24 of the Indian Constitution, a Fundamental Right enforceable in courts of law, directs that children below the age of 14 not be employed in factories, mines or any other hazardous occupations. Clauses (e) and (f) of Article 39, a Directive Principle of State Policy, urge that the tender age of children not be abused and argue for not allowing citizens to do work which is unsuitable because of their age or strength or on account of economic necessity. Though Directive Principles are not enforceable in courts, they embody the vision of the framers of the Indian Constitution. The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986, prohibits the working of children in some industries and is meant to regulate the conditions of their employment in others. Suffice it to say here that both Constitutional provisions and legal enactments in the sphere of child labour are implemented largely in the breach.¹

Another Directive Principle - Article 45 - enjoins upon the State a duty to provide free and compulsory education to all children until they reach fourteen years of age, within ten years of the commencement of the Constitution i.e. by 1960. There is no legal provision either under Central or State laws making education compulsory. As discussed below, there are millions of children who are either wholly illiterate or educated up to rudimentary levels. It is conventional to apply the criterion of age to distinguish the child from the adult worker. Both the Indian Constitution and the various labour laws mention the age of fourteen as the demarcating point.

But varying estimates abound as to the number of working children. According to the 1981 Census, work is defined as 'participation' in any economically productive activity. Main workers are those who have worked for the major part of the year preceding the date of enumeration and whose main activity was in either cultivation or as agricultural labourers or in household industry or in other work. Marginal workers are those who have done some work but cannot be classified as main workers. According to the 1981 Census, there were 13.59 million working children in India.² The National Sample Survey found that there were 17.36 million working children in India. Using another yardstick, the Operations Research Group (ORG) comes to the following conclusion:

"A working child is that child who was enumerated during the survey as a child falling within the 5 to 15 age bracket and who is at remunerative work, may be paid or unpaid, and busy any hour of the day within or outside the family... The estimated working children in our country are around 44.0 million."³

While the Census definition appears to be unreasonably restrictive, since it is unwilling to recognize that children play a very important economic role even if it is not always directly productive, the ORG figures seem closer to reality and underline the enormity of the problem.

According to the Ministry of Education, the figures of enrolment are as follows:⁴

Estimates in Education

	<u>Enrolment in classes</u> <u>1 to 5 (in millions)</u>	<u>Enrolment percentage</u> <u>6 to 11 year age group</u>
1950-51	19.155	42.6
1984-85	80.597	95.7

	<u>Enrolment in classes</u> <u>6 to 8 (in millions)</u>	<u>Enrolment percentage</u> <u>11 to 14 year age group</u>
1950-51	3.12	12.9
1984.85	27.237	53.2

Dr. Mohinder Singh, an eminent educationist, points out in an article the serious contradictions between these enrolment figures and the actual field situation. Singh's observations are based upon field experience and he asserts categorically that enrolment figures for classes 1 and 2 are practically fictitious. Spot studies have shown that many children whose names were enrolled in the school register had in fact not attended school for more than a few days. But since teachers are under pressure to show better enrolment targets, they keep the names of these children alive in their registers.⁵

When one compares the enrolment figures in the Census with those given by the Ministry of Education, there are again significant differences. For example, according to the Census of India of 1971, there were 50.68 million children below the age of 15 years who were enrolled. But the Ministry of Education statistics showed that the figure was 71.36 million.⁶

Singh argues that the Census figures should be higher than those of the Ministry of Education for the simple reason that the former include children studying in private institutions which are not recognized by the Education Department, while the Ministry's statistics are limited to those enrolled in recognized schools. But in fact the situation is exactly the reverse. If the enrolment figures for unrecognized schools are deducted, the Census total would fall sharply. Unlike the figures relating to child labour which are usually underestimated or unreported because employers are afraid of penal action, the same constraints do not apply to parents talking about the schooling of their children to Census enumerators.

In some States - like Uttar Pradesh - the over-reporting of enrolment by the Education Department is more than double so that while the 1971 Census shows that 6.46 million children below the age of 15 years were in school, the Ministry of Education figures are 13.25 million.⁷ Giving these statistics, Singh says:

"Keeping these factors in view, one could, with a degree of certainty, assess that for the age-group 6-11, not more than 50 per cent may be currently attending school in regular manner, as against the official enrolment figure of 95.73 per cent."⁸

This would mean then that about 40 million children in the age group 6 - 11 are not attending school in regular fashion as opposed to the official estimate that there are only 4 or 5 million such children. According to unofficial figures, there are almost 80 million children in the 6 - 14 age group not attending school. In sharp contrast, the Ministry of Education assesses the number of children not going to school in the relevant age group as around 30 million. We have looked in some detail into these differing estimates only in order to draw attention to the need to treat the figures given by the authorities with caution, if not skepticism. The nature and size of the problem change dramatically when one discounts official estimates in a realistic way. We feel that such a situation probably exists in other countries as well to varying extents, but have dwelt upon the Indian case for it has been well researched and documented.

The drop-out rate for children in India is equally dismal. According to Singh, the overall drop-out rate (inclusive of stagnation) for classes 1 to 5 has been hovering around 65 per cent and for classes 1 to 8 around 75 per cent. The situation has remained the same for the last thirty years. Thus, out of 100 children who join class 1, barely 35 complete class 5 and 25 complete class 8. A large percentage drops out in classes 1 and 2 itself, then lapsing into illiteracy.⁹

Infrastructure

Even these low levels of educational attainment are not uniform across the country, amongst different social groups and between sexes. The lack of an adequate infrastructure is one important reason for the inadequacies of the school system. India spends 3 per cent of its Gross National product (GNP) on education and this is less than the 3.2 per cent which Sri Lanka spends and the 5.7 per cent which China spends.¹⁰

Says singh:

"Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal have, between them, 75 per cent of the country's unenrolled children. Girls in classes 1 to 5 in rural areas constitute only 36.18 per cent of the total rural enrolment in those classes. Enrolment of boys from the scheduled castes and tribes has picked up but that of girls continues to be worryingly low."¹¹

It was found in 1978-79 that over 50 per cent of the primary schools did not have a regular building, 40 per cent were without a blackboard, 70 per cent without library books and 85 per cent without any toilet facilities. As Singh points out:

"Out of rupees 100 spent on primary school education, 95.3 per cent went to teachers' salaries, 1.9 for administration and supervision, leaving 1.7 for buildings and 1.1 for other expenses. Learning does not take place in such dismal surroundings."¹²

Furthermore, he adds:

"A third of India's primary schools are single teacher ones. If the teacher is absent, the school closes, if he is late, the school is delayed; not rare occurrences when so many teachers live outside the school village. Some teach 5 classes simultaneously! Even otherwise multiple-class teaching is resorted to in a big way, a need aggravated by teacher absenteeism. Some 82 per cent of the elementary schools have multiple-class teaching when the corresponding figure for Sri Lanka is 18, South Korea and Philippines 7."¹³

Shortcomings of the school system

About 90 per cent of India's working children live in the rural areas and are usually involved with some kind

of agricultural or allied activity. Boys and girls in village India take some of the burden from their parents in jobs like tending cattle, fetching water, fuel and fodder, cooking, cleaning and other domestic chores. Girl children tend to concentrate on domestic activity but as a result of the contribution of children, parents are able to go out and earn a living. As children grow older, they become more directly involved with agricultural operations like sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting and so on. During seasonal operations, such children are unable to attend school even if their parents wished them to and could afford to send them.

The Indian school system has a single point entry and consists of a sequential and full-time format of institutional instruction by full-time and professional teachers. One of the most comprehensive critiques of such a system in relation to the circumstances and needs of rural and agricultural society has been formulated by the noted educationist, the late J.P. Naik. Much of what he has to say would apply equally well to other countries in the Asian region. He argues for a radical transformation in the traditional model of formal education. Despite the advantages of the single point entry method, such as the creation of a homogeneous age group cohort, which rises year after year to successively higher classes, it means that the child who is unable to enter school at class 1 at the age of six remains outside it forever. Although in principle the same child could enter class 1 at age 11, he would have to be with much younger children and despite his readiness to go faster, he would have to learn at the same speed. Most likely he would become a drop out. Naik says: 14

"What such a child needs is specially organized classes where primary education is imparted through special techniques suited to his more mature mind. But there is no provision in our system for this purpose."

Naik recommends a multiple-entry point at different ages, say 9, 11, 14 and so on. According to him:

"The desire to learn may spring up in the minds of children at any of these later ages and our system should be elastic enough to

admit them into primary schools which are specially organized and where instruction is imparted on lines which are more suited to their maturity. Such alternative channels of admission would bring into the school system large numbers of children who now remain out and add merely to the numbers of illiterate adults."¹⁵

J.P. Naik makes a number of constructive suggestions to orient the school system to the needs of rural working children. For one thing, the school calendar should be so adjusted as to allow time off for agricultural operations like sowing and harvesting; for another, to reduce stagnation on account of children failing examinations, flexible systems which condense the curricula of classes 1 to 4 into a shorter period of about two years for children over 11, could be devised. Another important recommendation he makes is to have pre-schools or creches attached to primary schools so that girls could bring their younger siblings there and have them looked after as well as get an education. Instead of relying upon full-time professional teachers who raise the costs of the school system, Naik suggests simple solutions like employing local carpenters, tailors, singers and young persons who could teach for part of the time. Such a step would also generate additional local employment at lower cost. In summary, Naik's contribution has been to suggest that the school system be re-oriented to cater to the needs of working children in an agricultural society in a practicable and low-cost way.

Table 1: Child labour in some urban industries in India

Industry	Location	Total Workers	Child Workers
1. Slate	Mandsaur, Madhya	12,000 ^a	1,000 ^b
2. Slate	Markapur, Andhra Pradesh	15,000 ^c	not known
3. Diamond cutting	Surat, Gujarat	100,000 ^d	15,000 ^e

4. Agate-cutting	Cambay, Gujarat	30,000 ^f	not known
5. Gem polishing	Jaipur, Rajasthan	60,000	13,600 ^g
6. Powerloom	Bhiwandi, Maharashtra	300,000	15,000 ^h
7. Cotton hosiery	Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu	300,000	8,000 ⁱ
8. Carpet weaving	Mirzapur-Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh	200,000	150,000 ^j
9. Carpet weaving	Jammu and Kashmir	not known	100,000 ^k
10. Carpet weaving	Rajasthan	30,000	12,000 ^l
11. Lock making	Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh	80,000-90,000	7,000-10,000 ^m
12. Pottery	Khurja, Uttar Pradesh	20,000	5,000 ⁿ
13. Metalware	Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh	100,000	24,000 ^o
14. Match	Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu	not known	45,000 ^p
15. Glass	Firozabad, Uttar Pradesh	200,000	50,000 ^q
16. Silk & Silk Products	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	11,900	4,409 ^r
17. Textile products	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	3,512	1,108 ^s
18. Knives	Rampur, Uttar Pradesh	not known	3,000 ^t
19. Handicrafts	Jammu & Kashmir	90,000 ^u	not known

For footnotes see page 23.

The table given above lists a number of high concentration areas of child labour with estimates of the

numbers of children working in them. The lack of adequate infrastructure apart, the most common explanation that is advanced for parents not sending their children to school is their poverty. It is argued that the economic contribution of the child to the income of the family, whether by bringing in a wage or by doing household maintenance work and thus releasing adults for productive work, is so important that sending the child to school would not allow the family to survive. Clearly, there is some substance in such reasoning.

Yet, to rest content with such a version of events is to miss the exploitation by vested interests of young children. Many studies document the role of these vested interests and the impact they have upon the lives of these children. It is also true that working children in India, by and large, belong to the poor regions of the country, the socially disadvantaged sections of society and some minority groups. There is a vested interest in seeing that the children of the poor do not avail themselves of the facilities for education. Large numbers of children are lured away from schools by middlemen who offer a better life if they agree to work.

Vested Interests

In many of the large concentrations of child labour in India, such as Sivakasi in the State of Tamil Nadu, where the match industry is housed and where approximately 45,000 children are working, Smitu Kothari, a social activist, observes that:

"...in village after village we found cases where children were induced to leave school to support the family economically."¹⁶

The educational status of children in the match factories of Sivakasi is dismal. UNICEF conducted a sample study to investigate it. They conducted their survey in 16 factories employing 4,725 children. Of these 4,725 workers, 544 were working at home. The figures are startling as they reveal that of the 4,181 children studied, 3,323 or 79.39 per cent were totally illiterate. 474 children or 11.30 per cent of the sample had received education up to the primary level. There were 384 drop-outs accounting

for the balance of 9.40 per cent. When the research team looked at the wage register, they found that 80.7 per cent of the children had received payments after affixing their thumb impressions and only 19.5 per cent had signed their names. Thus in one of the largest concentrations of child labour, Sivakasi, nearly 80 per cent of the children were illiterate and most of them came to the factories from the rural areas in factory buses which left the village at 3. a.m. or 4. a.m. to return only after dusk. These children, mainly girls, belong to the Scheduled Caste communities* and work 10-14 hours a day at break-neck speed in order to earn a pittance of Rs. 2 or 3 ¹⁷ (Rs. 14 = U.S.\$1). The average age of the working child is between 8-12 years. According to the UNICEF report:

"It looks as though the mid-day meals programme is the chief motivational link for most children to attend schools in an irregular fashion."¹⁸

If one looks at the educational status of children working in the carpet factories, the situation is similar. Prembhai, a social worker, was asked by the Supreme Court of India to investigate the incidence of bonded child labour in the carpet industry of Mirzapur Bhadohi - Varanasi in the State of Uttar Pradesh. He interviewed 858 children who had migrated from the adjoining district of Palamau in the State of Bihar and found that only one child had been to high school. Thirteen children (1.5 per cent) had been educated from class 4 to 8. Sixty-five children (7.6 per cent) had received education from class 2 to class 5; seventeen children (2 per cent) were merely literate, and the bulk of 763 children, that is 88.9 per cent, were completely illiterate.¹⁹

* Scheduled Caste communities are those considered untouchable and who are entitled to special protection under the Constitution of India. The list of such Castes is given in a Schedule attached to the Constitution, hence the term Scheduled Castes. Another term used for them is Harijan.

School authorities in the carpet belt are extremely concerned at the growing trend of sending children to work rather than to school. Parents are being bribed by middlemen with small consumption loans and an assurance that the child will learn a skill; they are then made to work 14 to 16 hours a day under the most unhygienic conditions which are also akin to semi-slavery. The situation in the carpet belt of Mirzapur-Bhadohi-Varnasi is so grim that local teachers were really concerned about what would happen to those children who were being made to leave school in large numbers. Says Prembhai in his report:

"Some of the local teachers and village elders reacted sharply against the industry. They said that the children are not coming to the school. The Harijans are all sending their children for carpet weaving. Children are migrating to carpet areas resulting in many school drop-outs. The Principal of High School Ramapur, Kachhwa Block (Mirzapur) said that now we will have more teachers than students. The carpet industry will convert my school into a playground. One Harijan leader in Nayagaon, P.S. Lalganj (Mirzapur) said that the industry is blocking the development of Harijans and will further lead them towards illiteracy."²⁰

There are approximately 150,000 children working as carpet weavers in the Mirzapur - Bhadohi carpet belt.²¹ The number of working children in the carpet belt went up when the Government of India set up carpet weaving training centres in the Mirzapur area and other places and offered a stipend of Rs.60/- a month to the trainees. A large number of children were forced by their parents to leave school and join the training institutes.²² Once the children had dropped out of school, there was no question of returning. When there was a slump in the carpet industry, these children were the first to be retrenched. These illiterate or semi-literate children were forced to take on jobs in road-side restaurants, as domestic servants and so on.

The match industry of Sivakasi and the carpet industry of Mirzapur-Bhadohi-Varanasi are both illustrations of the consequences of using children for their labour. It is not accidental that in both cases, the children concerned belong to the socially lowest segment of society, i.e. the Scheduled Castes; these children are forced into relations of bondage with their employers, who suborn the parents by advancing small sums of money by way of loans and the children are bonded till the loan is returned at usurious rates of interest. Apart from an exploitative working environment, one glaring result of children's work is their almost complete illiteracy. It is most likely that when these uneducated children mature, they will in turn send their own children to these industries, caught as they are in the web of illiteracy and exploitation.

Child Labour and Rural India

It is demonstrable that children who work belong to the lowest strata of society and children who stay out of school also belong to the lowest rung in the class structure. Poromesh Acharya, in a study of child labour in four villages of two districts of West Bengal, found that of the total non-enrolled children in the age-group 6-16, 70.34 per cent belong to the two lowest agrarian classes, namely poor peasants and agricultural labourers.²³

According to Acharya:

"In fact, in response to a question as to what their non-enrolled children do during school hours, 92.23% of the total respondents belonging to the lower middle peasants, poor peasants and agricultural labourers who have non-enrolled children, maintained that their non-enrolled children were either gainfully employed or were engaged in household work like baby care, etc."²⁴

Acharya makes an important statement regarding the attitude of the upper strata of rural society towards free compulsory education. According to him, the attitude of the rural elite towards education for the masses is easily explicable:

"... any sort of education they fear will upset the stability of the traditional society, destroying the age-old relationship between them and the labouring people. It is no wonder that a majority of the jotedars and rich peasants we interviewed... were against making elementary education a compulsory condition. Illiteracy among the labouring people, they generally think, will help them maintain the traditional authority pattern of village life."²⁵

Acharya's study found that the rich peasants did not want compulsory education because it would be inconvenient for them although all the children of the jotedars* in the age group 6-11 and 84.31 per cent of the children of the rich peasants of the same age-group were enrolled. Acharya does not mince words when he says:

"The reasons are very simple. They are against compulsion as they fear that universal and compulsory enrolment would deprive them of the easy supply of child labour. In that case, they would need to hire adults at a higher wage instead of child labour, which would lead to an increase in their cost of agricultural production."²⁶

U.P. Arora also has a similar observation to make regarding the need for child labour by rich peasants in the State of Karnataka. He says:

"The main reason for landlords subjecting teenagers to jeetha ('bonded labour') is that they stay in the house all the time... With landlords sending their wards to towns and cities for higher education, they need extra hands to work in the house and in the fields."²⁷

Other studies are also pointers to local vested interests who do not want the children of the poor to get an education. The Rural Wing of the National Labour Institute conducted a study on bonded labour. Investigators interviewed some owners of bonded labourers in Andhra Pradesh

* *landlords*

about education for working children. Their response was:

"Once, they are allowed to come up to an equal level, nobody will go to the fields. Fields will be left uncultivated everywhere. We have to keep them under our strong thumb in order to get work done."²⁸

As in the case of unorganized industry, the cases cited above from backward sectors of the agricultural economy bring out the importance of the need for the upper segments of the population to maintain illiteracy and thereby their hold on a docile and submissive labour force. Despite Constitutional and other legal protection, the children of the Harijans or Scheduled Castes do not find it easy to gain access to the school system and face numerous obstacles in trying to enter it. When one studies the links between child labour and education, it is helpful to remember the social contexts in which child labour flourishes at the expense of education. The working child suffers from the double disadvantage of being illiterate as also belonging to economically poorer classes and social backward communities.

Working Children and Schools

There is a point of view frequently propounded by professionals in the field of education and policy makers that the existing school system is irrelevant to the needs of working children. It is argued that sterile curricula, rote-based learning and the poor quality of teachers, amongst other ills, plague the school system and that, therefore, neither the parents of working children nor the children themselves are keen to gain access to it. It is suggested that to argue that the parents of working children do not send them to school primarily because of the supposed irrelevance of the curricula is to be profoundly mistaken. Rather, evidence from the field suggests that parents have a deep interest in educating their children for the mobility that education alone can provide to the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society. Commonly, difficult economic circumstances prevent the fulfilment of this aspiration; inadequate school infrastructure tilts the balance in favour of work. The author has personal experience from the study of five industries where children

work in large numbers: glass, lock, gem polishing, pottery and brass ware industries. Here we will try to look at the problems faced by these working children and the attitudes of their parents.

Approximately 13,000 children below the age of 14 years are working in the gem polishing industry of Jaipur. In this industry there are two categories of working children. The first category - about 50 per cent of the total - is made up of those who work full time from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. and belong to families of manual labourers. These children are in the age range of 6 to 10, and are completely illiterate. In the second category are children of families who have a fairly steady income: some parents are involved in gem polishing, but others hold occupations as government servants, tailors, barbers, etc. Their children go to schools - mainly government schools - and work for about four hours a day after school. Their age range is 10 to 14.

The children of master craftsmen or good artisans who earn a high wage do not work even though gem polishing is done at home. They also enter the gem polishing industry but usually after they have completed their schooling and certainly not before the age of 15.

I asked a school teacher why some parents, though keen to send their children to school, do not do so, and I was told:²⁹

"Primary education is virtually free and the school fees are Rs.5 for the whole year for classes 3 to 5 and Rs.30 a year for classes 6 to 8. There are also special concessions for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but the parents still have to spend at least Rs.150 to Rs.200 a year on books and uniforms. It is those people who cannot even bear this additional expense who send their children to work."³⁰

Hafizbhai, father of one of the working children, said:

"Most of us get T.B. and we can't afford to get any treatment. How can I afford to

send my child to school?"³¹

At least fifty per cent of all children working in the gem polishing industry are completely illiterate. Some of them have been educated up to the third standard and others dropped out even earlier. Since the education they had received was so meagre, whatever they learnt in the early years has been forgotten and today they are completely illiterate. Surprisingly, this is one industry where the need for education for upward mobility is seen as an absolute necessity by all those involved in the industry.³² Master craftsmen, contractors, traders - all felt that some basic education was absolutely necessary to become an artisan. Bade Mian said:

"Without education, you are finished. You can easily be cheated by the trader. You can never hope to expand your business because you won't be able to speak or understand the language you need. You will never be able to communicate with the foreigners who are the real buyers."³³

In the gem polishing industry of Jaipur, it was widely recognized that there was a perceptible nexus between education and upward mobility. The status of a man in the hierarchy could easily be assessed by the criterion of whether he sent his child to work or to school. By and large, it was the illiterate worker whose child would go to work whereas the children of the artisans, the traders, exporters, etc. would all go to school. If a man was able to even slightly improve his economic standing, his first priority would be to withdraw his child from work and get him an education.

In the brass-ware industry of Moradabad, approximately 40,000 - 45,000 children are working full time. I asked why some parents send their children to work and others do not and the unanimous response was "If you can't feed your children, where is the question of paying for their education?" But when I said that primary school education was free for children, the response was:

"Are there enough schools in Moradabad?
Children don't get admission into Government

schools and we can't afford to pay Montessori school fees. If today there were more schools, half the problems would be solved."³⁴

I asked whether parents felt that school education was irrelevant and whether therefore they did not send their children to school but made them work instead. The answer was:

"If today the Government comes up with a scheme to provide education to all children and sets up schools, all these children working would leave work and go to school. No one sends their children to work because they think that education is irrelevant. But if there are no schools, then children are sent to work."³⁵

Hafizbhai Namunewale was adamant and said that the problem of child labour was closely linked to the problem of illiteracy. He said:

"I'll give it to you in writing that educated parents do not send their children to work. It is only illiterate parents who put their children to work at an early age."³⁶

Rahim Khan, designer, has educated all his children. He said:

"The evidence of what education can do for you is all around us. Look at the exporters, they have become multi-millionaires before our eyes. Their children are in boarding schools. And look at us artisans - uneducated - how easily we are being exploited. If you are educated, you know what the laws are, the Government policy is."³⁷

Abidinbhai said:

"It is very important to educate women. If you educate a boy, it is like educating one person. But if you educate a girl, she in turn will educate her children."

Hafizbhai added:

"Give education to children and their eyes will open up automatically."³⁸

In the glass factories of Firozabad in the State of Uttar Pradesh, the workers are dependent for their livelihood on the glass manufacturers. With low and uncertain wages, it is difficult for them to feed their children; the option of sending their children to school is simply not real.³⁹ Not surprisingly, illiteracy is widespread amongst these children. Nevertheless, there are a few examples of parents who have put everything into educating their children despite their desperate economic straits. Said a worker in response to a question as to whether he would train his child in his vocation:

"My life is virtually over at 36. Do you think I want my son to suffer like this? If I can somehow see him through school, I'll try and keep him out of this industry. I don't want my son to die at the age of 40, which is bound to happen to someone working 12 to 14 hours a day in this intense heat. But I know that I cannot work beyond another month; then how will I pay for his school clothes? If he doesn't have proper clothes, the teacher will not let him enter the classroom. Sooner or later, circumstances will force me to put him to work."⁴⁰

In the glass factories of Firozabad and in other hazardous industries like the slate industry in Mandsaur, in the State of Madhya Pradesh⁴¹ and the lock⁴² and brassware industries in Aligarh and Moradabad, in the State of Uttar Pradesh, dangerous working conditions in an unsafe environment result in the debilitation or death of workers at a relatively young age, forcing their children to go to work and support their impoverished families. Health hazards then help continue the vicious circle of poverty, disease and a lack of education. It was noticeable that most often children who went to work had illiterate parents themselves and that those who used the labour of children almost never made their own off-spring work but sent them to school.⁴³

We have seen how the children of the poor are kept away from school for a host of reasons: the lack of

infrastructure, poverty and exploitation, health hazards and so on. But the author's experience in the field runs contrary to the view referred to earlier, namely that the parents of working children did not wish to send their children to school because of the irrelevance of the school curricula or other ills of the school system. Though there were a few such instances, in the overwhelming majority of cases, parents of working children had education for their children as one of their deepest aspirations but were usually unable to fulfil it.

The National Child Labour Policy

The Government of India has recently announced the National Child Labour Policy (NCLP) for ten child labour concentration areas. In these areas, schemes for income and employment generation are to be devised and the prevailing developmental programmes are to be better co-ordinated and intensified. Non-formal education, health and nutrition programmes will also be part of the overall strategy for improving the lives of working children. It is planned to cover 30,000 children under the NCLP.

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II. MALAYSIA

Education

It is estimated that the population of Malaysia in 1985 was 15.8 million, of which the 0 to 14 age group accounted for 6 million or 38.3 per cent of the total.⁴⁴ In Malaysia, theoretically a child enters primary school at the age of seven years, where he studies for six years and then moves on to the lower secondary level for three years. At the end of this period, he sits for the first major examination of the Lower Certificate of Education. School attendance is not compulsory, and although the Government claims that 99 per cent of the school-age children are enrolled, every year 70,000 to 75,000 school children enter the labour market on failing to get through the Lower Certificate of Education Examination.⁴⁵

Drop-outs

Says Ah-Eng Lai:⁴⁶

"Even though schooling may be free, work becomes 'compulsory' for children from impoverished backgrounds. Children dropping out of school not only lighten the family's financial burdens, their help or employment directly or indirectly supplements incomes. Although educational qualifications promise a better future, the harsh realities of poverty and the extremely limited employment opportunities in a situation of high unemployment and lack of training opportunities make dropping out of school a realistic choice for poor children."

Further, using the data from a Government Report, Ah-Eng Lai goes on to say:

"The Murad Report on School Drop-Outs, 1976 found that out of two million pupils enrolled at primary level, 10 to 30 per cent drop out every year! There are various reasons involved but the main reasons is poverty."

This is particularly true of rural school children. The report also shows that only 10 per cent of the 15 age group pupils (before the 1972 Lower Certificate of Education Examination) from the lower income sector continue their secondary school education. Most of these drop-outs land in some form of employment, mostly in low-paying, unskilled jobs in the "informal" sector.⁴⁷

Child Labour

According to the Anti-Slavery Society Report of 1980 on child labour in West Malaysia, which was presented to the United Nations Working Group of Experts on Slavery in 1979, 9.5 per cent of all boys and 5.5 per cent of all girls between the ages of 10 and 14 belonged to the labour force.⁴⁸

Child labour can be found in all sectors of the economy. In the urban areas, children make up an essential part of the work-force in catering, small-scale industry and commerce, where they make up at least one-third of the work-force.⁴⁹

In Malaysia, there is no law totally banning child labour. In fact, in 1966, when the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act was passed, it repealed the Children and Young Persons Ordinance, 1947, which had a minimum age of 8 years for working children. The current law does not have a minimum age.⁵⁰ The Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act, 1966 is also applicable only to West Malaysia.⁵¹

The explanation for the widespread use of child labour in Malaysia is, according to the Anti-Slavery Society, a result of the uneven nature of the growth of the Malaysian economy over the last decade, which has limited development to certain sectors. High capital investment has been restricted to the foreign and multi-national owned electronics and textiles industries which occupy the Free Trading Zones. The other sectors like agriculture and small-scale industries have not had inputs in terms of capital or improved technology and, therefore, they remain

viable only by cutting down on labour costs in order to maximize profits. These are some of the important factors for the growing demand for child labour.

Ah-Eng Lai, in her study of child labour in the small-scale industries of Penang, reports that 43 per cent of the Malaysian population live below the poverty line. Rural families are particularly badly off. According to her:

"Given that 45 per cent of the total population are children below fourteen years of age and given that poor families tend to have many children, it is clearly the case that the majority of Malaysian children come from poor backgrounds."⁵²

According to the 1980 Malaysian Population Census Report, over 43,000 children between the ages of 10 to 14 have started working to supplement the family income. Of these, 10,214 worked in the rubber estates, 11,609 were involved with agricultural activities, 8,058 in commerce and services, 4,233 in the manufacturing sector and 8,927 were classified as others.⁵³

Ah-Eng Lai's study of the small-scale sector in Penang showed that children were working in the seafood, boat-making and repairs, joss-sticks, incense, firewood, charcoal, furniture, garment, foundries and light engineering industries. While the sample of this study was small - 85 children - the age range of the working children was between 12 and 16 years and 80 per cent were in the 14-16 age-group. In many occupations, working children composed nearly 40 per cent of the work-force and more.⁵⁴ All the 85 respondents were of Chinese ethnic origin and lived at their work place. More than 55 per cent had only had 4 to 6 years of schooling, while those who had attended school for more than 6 years accounted for 35 per cent of the total. Interestingly, the girls had less schooling than the boys and the few children who still attended school were all male.⁵⁵

Ah-Eng Lai's study showed that only 26 per cent of the children gave poverty as the main cause of giving up school, but 43 per cent of the children dropped out of school because they could not study or were not interested. Ah-Eng Lai believes that the irrelevance of the curriculum is one main cause of drop-outs. But one thing seems clear: that the parents of these working children were either illiterate or semi-literate and in low-paid, manual jobs.

Labour Law

There is hardly any legal protection for working children. The child labour laws have been liberalized and, according to the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act of 1966, there is no minimum age for the employment of children.⁵⁶ Jamo argues that the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act of 1966 is an ineffectual and widely abused piece of legislation. Of 20,000 inspections carried out by the Malaysian Labour Ministry between 1978 and 1982, only 82 led to prosecutions of errant employers.⁵⁷

Children on Plantations

It is apparent that child labour is a major problem in the oil palm and rubber estates of Malaysia. Sixty per cent of the child labour force was to be found in the age range of 6-10 in the oil palm plantations and 56 per cent of the working children in the rubber estates are between the age of 10 and 12.⁵⁸ The main jobs that children do include pesticide spraying, picking of cocoa pods, weeding and stacking of oil palm fronds. In the rubber estates, children help their parents to clean latex cups and collect latex.

The problem of child labour in the Malaysian plantations is clearly related to educational opportunities available for young children. According to Sonny Inbaraj, a social activist, it is a deliberate strategy of the planters who do not want to provide schooling for the children of plantation workers in order to control a subservient and docile labour force.⁵⁹ Thus, while the Labour Code of 1923 stipulated that every estate containing 10 or more children of

school-going age had to have a school, this was not done on the grounds of inability to provide resources.⁶⁰ The planters' lobby could not prevent the enactment of the Labour Code of 1923, but the infrastructure provided was inadequate, all grades were taught by one teacher and there was no compulsory attendance. On the other hand, job opportunities were provided to all children between the ages of 10 and 14. Illiterate and ignorant parents whose income was very low used the children for work.⁶¹

Jomo and his colleagues investigated the incidence of child labour in the Malaysian plantations and found that parents sent their children to work to augment the family income.

But

"...(an) important reason cited by parents in both types of estates was that they 'cannot afford to send their children to school'. This was the most important reason stated in oil palm estates (31.9%) and the second most important cited in rubber estates (27.9%)."⁶²

While poverty is the main reason which forces parents to send children to work, it must also be kept in mind, as Jomo says, that:

"The increasing work load in the plantations aimed at cutting down labour costs and increasing profits has increased the numbers of children assisting their parents. Assistance from children is the way to complete the task of tapping 500 to 600 rubber trees to qualify for the minimum daily wage for a rubber tapper. To qualify for this daily wage, the oil palm harvester must bring in 2 tonnes of fruit, and yet again, assistance from the child worker is the saviour."⁶³

Another report makes the same point that while poverty forces parents to send children to work, it is linked to the fact that workers are rarely paid their due wages. Thus, while in the rubber estates:

"...labour productivity increased by 120% between 1960 and 1981, but the real wages remained unchanged. Between 1980 and 1983, the official poverty rate among estate workers rose from 35 % to 55%."64

Jomo's study found:

"...that in all the households interviewed, more than 75% of income was spent on food, and the remainder had to be spent on transport, clothing, medicine and a bare minimum on education. Most parents could not afford to send their children to urban schools, as in Prang Besar and Sungei Bilut. Because of insufficient income, many parents, especially those sending their children to town schools, have to stop their children's schooling and send them to work."65

It is not surprising that the 1982 Socio-Economic Research Unit (SERU) survey of 28 plantations found that only 20% of plantation workers' children reached the Lower Certificate of Education (Form 3 level, about 15 years of age). Of these, less than half passed.⁶⁶ The 1973 Murad report on school drop-outs found that the Tamil schools had the highest drop-out rate of all.⁶⁷ An important reason for the high drop-out rate amongst estate children was the poor living conditions of plantation workers. The 1980 Malaysian Ministry of Labour survey showed that out of 1,766 rubber estates, only 335 or 19% provided schooling and only 16% of the oil palm estates provided schooling for the children of their workers.⁶⁸

Not only are the infrastructural facilities inadequate in the sense that most of the schools are single teacher schools but, as the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) found in a recent survey of plantations in Malaysia, some schools looked more like 'cow-sheds' and did not have proper ventilation - windows, fans, etc. and the conditions were very unhygienic.⁶⁹

Another significant reason, apart from poverty, was that the plantation workers' children generally receive their primary education in Tamil estate schools,

in Tamil, with English and Malay as second languages. But the Malay language is the medium of instruction in the government secondary schools. The child who has been taught in Tamil at the primary level cannot cope with the Malay language at the secondary school level. It was found that 78% of the estate children dropped out of primary school and only 0.4% completed their secondary education.⁷⁰

As Inbaraj points out:

"Tamil language education has been the Cinderella of the Malayan education system, both pre- and post-World War 2...the remoteness of these single-teacher plantation schools, the absence of post primary Tamil education and the lack of opportunity for other than labouring employment, makes education a basically aimless endeavour."⁷¹

Whatever the parental outlook, children who were withdrawn from school and put to work, preferred school. Sakthi Nathan, age 9, told investigators that he liked school but his father said he could not send all the five children to school and therefore withdrew Sakthi Nathan.⁷² Manggama is 10 years old and has been helping her father since she was 7 and has never gone to school. Her father said:

"I felt it is better for her to learn how to tap, than to be a drop-out later, and not know how to do anything. Nowadays even educated people are finding it hard to look for jobs."⁷³

Chandran, who is 8 years old, also prefers school because the work of marking trees is very hard. Paramasivam is 13 years old and he starts work at 5.30 a.m. and only returns after 2.00 p.m. In 1982, he started tapping trees for his mother. He said:

"I prefer to go to school rather than tap because it is very tedious

to do latex tapping. I have to work because the more trees we tap, the more money we will be able to earn to keep the family going."⁷⁴

While there are parents who cannot afford to keep children in school, the study of 28 estates in Peninsular Malaysia found that 64.7% of the respondents interviewed encouraged their children to move out of the estates. The main reason that parents gave was that they wanted their children to have access to better educational opportunities, which could lead to upward mobility.⁷⁵ In fact, despite the poor quality of education available, a large number of children are withdrawn from school and put to work so that their earnings can support siblings in school.⁷⁶

Admittedly, there appears to be meagre, authentic documentation whether from official or non-official sources, on the issue of child labour and education in Malaysia. Yet, on the basis of what is available, it is apparent that ethnic groups and minorities like the Chinese and the Tamils on the plantations face particular difficulties. Programme interventions then would have to consider questions like the improvement of the economic lot of plantation workers and the upgrading of schooling facilities in their local environment.

III. THE PHILIPPINES

The Educational Background

Although formal education came to the Philippines with the Educational Decree of 1963, which established a uniform course of study for primary schools, made provision for the training of teachers and placed all schools under government supervision and control, the real spread of education came after Independence in 1946. The Constitution of the Philippines of 1973 directed the State to:

"Maintain a system of free public elementary education and, in areas where finances permit, establish and maintain a system of free public education at least up to the secondary level."⁷⁷

The Presidential Decree No. 603, popularly known as the Child and Youth Welfare Code, says that:

"Every child has the right to an education commensurate with his abilities and to the development of his skills for the improvement of his capacity for service to himself and his fellowmen and that the child, in turn, has a responsibility to undergo formal education so that he will become an asset to society."⁷⁸

The Education Act of 1982 provides the legal basis for the country's educational development plan. The national law requires that all parents enrol their children in school at the age of 7 or 6½ if they have attended pre-school. The Government provides free tuition and textbooks in public schools and allows private primary schools to operate if they meet the required standard.⁷⁹

In the Philippines, primary education comprises the first four years of elementary education from grade I to IV. Pre-school education is not a part of the formal education system.⁸⁰

According to the 1985 population figures, the total population of the Philippines was 54.7 million, of which 13.1 million were in the age range of 5 to 14 years, comprising 24 per cent of the total population. The Report of the National Conference on The Filipino Child⁸¹ takes a critical view of the educational achievements made by the Filipinos. According to this report, although the Government claims a literacy rate of 87 per cent with a 90 per cent enrolment rate in the 7-12 age-group:

"...(in) 1983-84, the cohort survival rate for students in government elementary schools was only 65.23 per cent."⁸²

Says the report:

"Although we may boast of a high literacy rate, we also have the lowest literacy growth rate for the past 20 years...at a dismal 4.2 per cent beside Thailand's 26.5 per cent and Indonesia's 59 per cent. This means that the gains have been slow, and many questions have been raised about the literacy rate itself, on how functional literacy is for Filipinos, most of whom acquire only the most rudimentary reading and writing skills."⁸³

This report, prepared by some non-governmental organizations, feels that the quality of education in the Philippines has been rapidly deteriorating. Thus:

"Despite public clamor for education to get a bigger slice of the national budget, and hopefully at the expense of the defense budget, the present government...has remained unresponsive to the demand. The budget for the Education Ministry has dropped from an average of 28.5% of the total national budget in the 1960s to 9.1 % in the 1980s."⁸⁴

There seem to be several problems with the Filipino educational system, many of them similar to those faced by South Asian countries like India.

The government-funded public school system is grossly inadequate with teachers being paid meagre wages and made to do other government jobs like Census work, etc. The fall-out of this has been that the percentage of passers at the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) has declined from a high of 75 per cent in 1973 to 55 per cent in 1983. Says the report:

"those who fail to meet a certain score are sent to vocational and technical schools, where they are trained to provide a cheap labour force for the country's pseudo-industrialization programme, dominated by multi-national companies."⁸⁵

The children who make it through the NCEE are those who go to the private schools and who can afford to pay the exorbitant fees.

Aspects of Child Labour

It is difficult to make an accurate estimate of child labour in the Philippines because children below the age of fifteen are not counted in the labour force statistics.⁸⁶

According to the National Conference on the Filipino Child in Crisis held in January 1986, it was estimated that there are roughly 3.5 million Filipino child workers in the manufacturing, agricultural and service sectors.⁸⁷ At the end of 1985, it was estimated that the total population of children in the 0-14 age-group was 22 million.⁸⁸ Other observers⁸⁹ believe that a large proportion of children who are unpaid workers, self-employed, children in the film industry and young agricultural workers go unrecorded as working children. Oosterhout, in the most recent study of child labour in the Philippines, says that roughly 2.7 million children are working full time and, if the number of children working part-time is added, the figure could range from 3 million to 8 million, depending on the definitions used.⁹⁰

Child labour in the Philippines is to be found in every sector of the economy - on the streets as

vendors, in the small-scale factories, in the rural areas, where they work as part of family labour and as domestic outworkers helping in small cottage industries making baskets, embroidery, doing sewing as well as working as domestic servants.

In the rural areas, the informal and the co-operative fishing sector, namely the Muru-Ami operations, use a large number of children. The Special Committee for the Development and Promotion of Underwater Diving Tourism estimated that the commercial operators alone employ 15,000 people and 70 per cent are children (boys) between the ages of 8 to 17 years. Even these figures are under-estimates.⁹¹

Under Filipino Labour Code, no child below 15 years of age may be employed unless he or she is working directly under the sole responsibility of parents or guardians.⁹²

For several reasons, the child labour population in the Philippines is increasing. One of them is that while in the 1960s, the Filipino government had a very vigorous programme of compulsory education, in the next decade, more children went to work. One of the main reasons cited in a study done by the Philippines Institute of Industrial Relations was that school attendance was reduced from 8 to 6 hours and this allowed many children to work part-time and attend school.⁹³

Another factor in the growing problem of child labour is the economic crisis faced since 1983. The Philippines Institute of Industrial Relations report of 1985 says that local industries experienced problems of rising inflation, tight credit and lack of raw material - all of which resulted in the scaling down of business operations and many businesses even closed down. This dislocation adversely affected the workers who were laid off. In 1984, inflation rose to 50.3 per cent, though it fell to 23.1 per cent in 1985. When real wages declined, a demand was created for child labour in order to save on wages. The economic crisis was largely responsible for the increase in the child labour population.

This crisis had far-reaching repercussions leading to large-scale migration of children to the cities. In the Philippines, the major problem today is of street children, though there are pockets of child labour concentrations such as the Muro-Ami fishing operations and the food, garment and seafood processing industries.

Vested Interests

The Muro-Ami fishing operation is an example of how vested interests can trap people, leaving them with no alternative but work for survival. This is an occupation which employs some of the largest number of children in the 7 to 12 age-group and which is extremely dangerous with a very high mortality rate. The Muro-Ami fishing operation recruits labour from Oslob and Santander, two villages in Southern Cebu island in central Philippines. This operation is entirely in the hands of the Abines family who, not only own vast tracts of agricultural land, but also the credit facilities, the general stores, run buses and farms - in short have complete control over the area. Those who do not work for them or send their children for deep-sea diving do not have access to credit nor can they buy essential commodities or market their produce locally. The result is that in 1987, 60 to 65 per cent of the local people were directly or indirectly dependent on the Muro-Ami operations for their livelihood. The method of payment is such that at the end of the 10-month contract, people are indebted to the fishing operation and are forced to join again on another contract. Approximately 15 per cent of the deep-sea divers are children under the age of 15 years. Oosterhout states:

"...many children in Oslob and Santander voluntarily join the Muro-Ami operations. Others, though, are forced to leave school and engage in fishing because of financial problems. Oslob, for instance, does not have a public secondary school and fees at the privately-owned high schools are expensive. Around half of the schoolboys in Oslob join the Muro-Ami operation after grade 4 to 5,

although some of them return to school at a later date."94

If children do not work and there is no school in the vicinity, they have no choice but to migrate to the big cities.

The Muro-Ami fishing operation is just one example of the kind of vested interests that are found working in all countries of the South Asian and South East Asian region, which create conditions where there is no alternative to labour and when minimum school facilities are not provided, there is no real option.

It is when the poor send their children to work, either because school facilities are non-existent or when they are of such poor quality that parents feel the child is better off working, that experts talk of the irrelevance of and the lack of perceived returns from education relative to work. The vicious cycle continues unbroken when it is found that a major factor in the children going to work is the parents' illiteracy.

The Illiteracy of Parents

The Institute of Industrial Relations undertook a study of 455 working children in Metro Manila and in the provincial centres of Agoncillo and Paete and in 105 industrial concerns and they found that:

"the educational status of the household head is also closely linked to whether or not the child works. The fathers of most child workers in the study had generally low levels of education and were, therefore, only able to obtain poorly paid jobs. As the principal breadwinner in the family, a father's educational attainment directly affects family income. A significant number of the fathers of the child workers had barely completed high school. On the other hand, the fathers of non-working children had attained a higher educational level and some were high school or college graduates. However, the educational attainment of mothers

was not a significant factor affecting rates of child work."⁹⁵

Other observers believe that even when families can afford to send their children to school, they do not do so because they consider the formal educational system irrelevant.⁹⁶

Defects and Remedies in the School System

Pinlac, in another paper,⁹⁷ elaborates some of the major problems with the formal schooling system. Some of his criticisms are that:

1. the formal schooling system is mainly interested in providing a malleable and committed work-force of docile citizens who accept exploitation and are not concerned with developing and refining the creative facilities of children.
2. the formal school system tends to be academic in principle and does not cater to practical needs.
3. And more importantly, the formal schooling may be harmful in that it weakens rather than strengthens the child's ability to survive in an environment of poverty, high unemployment and malnutrition. It often creates 'false' needs and forces children to refuse employment which would otherwise be crucial for survival.

Many suggestions have been offered for improving the educational status of working children. It is suggested that special literacy and vocational training programmes may be integrated into the existing network of the formal educational system.⁹⁸

The Industrial Relations Institute⁹⁹ has made several recommendations regarding education for working children. It is felt that there should be changes made in the elementary and secondary curricula, which would equip children to enter the labour market if they cannot continue their education. These curricula should include vocational training courses relevant for both agriculture and industry and should also have a programme of internship or apprenticeship. These

apprenticeship schemes should be carefully monitored so that exploitation by employers is eventually eliminated.

Since Filipinos traditionally give great importance to education, many children work in order to complete their education. Thus it is pointed out that:

"Schooling, therefore, is not a sign that a youth is not working, it could even be the *raison d'être* for working."¹⁰⁰

According to this study, about 13 per cent of the children need to work to support their studies.

IV. SRI LANKA

Success in Education

Under Sinhalese law, a child is generally defined as a person under the age of 14 years and child labour is banned under the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act. Amongst South Asian countries, Sri Lanka stands out for its impressive educational achievements. The tradition of learning was given strong impetus initially by the Buddhist monasteries and later by the Portuguese and the Dutch through their missions. In the 1840s and 1850s, English missionaries helped spread education. As early as the 1920s and 1930s, the government decided to enforce compulsory schooling.

By 1960-61, the government took over most of the privately run government-assisted schools. There was accelerated school enrolment during this period and the enrolment in primary education increased from 58 per cent in 1946 to 74 per cent in 1963, while secondary education increased from 11 per cent in 1953 to 43 per cent in 1963. Cultural nationalism was one of the main driving forces that changed the course of educational development in Sri Lanka. Sinhala became the medium of instruction and brought education to the masses. One estimate has it that the adult literacy rate is 86.1 per cent.

It has been estimated that 90 per cent of children in the age-group 5 to 11 and 72 per cent of those in the 5 to 16 age-group are in school. Another survey has it that 60 per cent of the children complete five years of compulsory schooling.

Some Dimensions of Child Labour

While there is no doubt that the Sri Lankan example is a success story - particularly in the South Asian context - when one looks at the situation from the child labour point of view, it seems less optimistic. According to the 1980 Census, there are 3.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 14

in Sri Lanka, but only 2.7 million are attending school; the other 1.1 million are either working or begging. Children work both as part of family labour and for wages, as domestic servants, as helpers to fishermen, on tea estates, etc.¹⁰¹

Fernando's study on child labour in Sri Lanka also puts the number of working children at at least 1 million or about 26 per cent of the total number of children.

Fernando quotes extensively from a UNICEF report on child labour in Sri Lanka done in 1982. It was found that children by and large work in places where a lot of people congregate, such as market places, streets and bus terminals. In the rural areas, they help in clearing the land for cultivation, ploughing, weeding and harvesting of agricultural produce.¹⁰²

They migrate from rural to urban areas where they work as domestic servants. Many children in the urban areas are self-employed and help their parents making matches and incense sticks.¹⁰³ A large number of children are involved in the retail trade selling lottery tickets, shopping bags, newspapers, vegetables, fish, etc. They also lift and carry head-loads, fish, clean the fishing nets, work in the gem pits and so on.

According to the UNICEF study, most of the working children have been to school and only 26 per cent of the sample had never attended school. A large number of children combine work and school. Those children who go to school, rarely work longer than 8 hours a day because their day begins at 5.00 a.m. and ends at 6.30 p.m. Children often work till late at night at their school work. At the time of the UNICEF survey, 33 per cent of the sample of working children were attending school, while 67 per cent had stopped schooling. Children usually started school between the ages of 5 to 7 years. But by the time they were 9 years of age, most children of lower income families dropped out and started working.¹⁰⁴

The UNICEF study amongst working children in Sri Lanka was interesting in that it found:

"... that 76% of the children who were attending school stated that their job did not interfere with education and a further 86% said they had no intention of giving up their schooling. It is also interesting to note that half of the children going to school said that they were within the top of their class during the last term examination."¹⁰⁵

It would appear from the UNICEF study that children do at least get a few years of schooling and manage to work at the same time. Their entry into the labour force takes place at a later age.

Children on Tea Estates

An unpublished report of the Anti-Slavery Society on child labour in the tea estates of Sri Lanka shows that children constitute nearly half the population of the tea estates and are a great asset to their parents. There are approximately 900,000 workers in the tea estates and 45.9 per cent of the total population is made up of children below the age of fourteen with most of them working as part of family labour.

The tea estates in Sri Lanka, as in India and Bangladesh as well, have a long tradition of child labour. This is done through a system of contract work. The usual system is to give a plot of tea to a woman to pluck the leaves. To complete this task as quickly as possible, she uses all the members of her family. Again, the work of weeding and pruning of the tea bushes is given out on a contract basis to family units.¹⁰⁶

The system of payment is, however, changing and child labour is also banned under Sinhala law.¹⁰⁷ But the work-load of the mother is so great that she has no choice but to use her children. While male children may be sent to school, female children are

usually denied education and made to help the mother. The schools in the tea estates are few and far between and the workers on the tea estates came from India as indentured labour. They have not integrated with the dominant culture and remain outside the development framework. The literacy level of children in the estates is thus far lower than the national average. Many children also migrate to the urban areas to look for jobs. In some estates, creches are funded by UNICEF and other organizations. It was found that in the UNICEF creches, which are well run with trained creche attendants, many working mothers were bringing their children so releasing an older sibling for school. But distance from home was the key factor. If the creche was too far away from home and the work place, even the added attraction of the meals provided at the creches was not enough for the mothers.¹⁰⁸

To sum up, one might say that the Sri Lankan experience demonstrates the successful impact of a progressive educational policy combined with a restrictive child labour law. In comparison with other countries of the region, literacy rates are high and most children do get some years of schooling. Yet, there are certain pockets or enclaves of concentration of child labour. The fishing and gem industries and the tea estates are examples that run counter to the general trend. In particular, the children of the Tamil tea estate workers are compelled by the mode of production and the system of payment to work and supplement meagre family incomes. As a result, this group has not benefitted in the same measure as have the general run of the child population.

V. THAILAND

Education

Thailand has had a very long tradition of education even before the modern school system was established. Being essentially a Buddhist country, education was centred around the temples and the monks organized schools and provided a basic education to children. Young men learnt during their period of temple service by memorizing and copying scriptures. In 1921, primary education for children between the ages of 7 and 11 was made compulsory by royal decree. Since then, the government has placed emphasis on primary education, and a fifth of the national budget is spent on education, mainly primary education.¹⁰⁹ The legal age at which children start primary school is 7. Theoretically, 4 years of primary education is compulsory for all children in Thailand, but many observers feel that in practice a large number of children do not go to school.¹¹⁰

One estimate has it that the literacy rate in Thailand is 87.7 per cent. It would appear that most children in the age-group 7 to 11 have had some years of education and have achieved a certain degree of literacy. This situation is quite different from what one observes in many countries of South Asia, such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Nepal. Yet, certain groups of children and certain areas in the country have been left behind in the progress towards universalization of primary education.

Many reasons are given for this. In a paper written by the office of the National Primary Education Commission of the Ministry of Education in 1983, it is pointed out that:

"...the Primary Education Act B.E. 2523 exempts certain categories of children from attending school whenever parents justify that

- 1) their children are physically or mentally handicapped;
- 2) their children suffer from a serious contagious

disease;

- 3) their children have to look after their parents who are physically disabled and have no next-of-kin to depend on; and
- 4) they have some other reason acceptable to the government, as stipulated by the Ministry's proclamation."¹¹¹

According to this report,

"This Primary Education Act B.E. 2523 is indeed a loophole that makes it impossible for the universalization policy to achieve, for compulsory education cannot reach the poor, the physically, mentally and socially handicapped, and the disadvantaged."¹¹²

The report explains the problems of reaching all sectors of society in Thailand. Thus:

"Findings of the Education Reform Committee show that 80% of the population reside and make a living in the rural areas and it is generally recognized that there exist a number of sub-cultures which are distinctive from the culture of the main population especially in the language, costume, every day life customs, and even in religion. It is, therefore, not feasible to assume a general culture of the country and provide education to all these minority groups on the basis of such a culture. It is the difference in the language and religion that poses a problem on the learning of children from minority groups."¹¹³

And finally:

"As for hill-tribes in north Thailand, there has been no Census and their number is estimated at 200,000 to 500,000. The proportion of hill-tribe children who take formal schooling below 15 years of age is

very small - merely 14 to 39% of the school-age group. No province attains 50% enrolment ratio. Most children who go to school are in lower primary grades, and almost none are in secondary grades."¹¹⁴

Child Labour

The major Act governing labour relations in Thailand is Announcement No. 103 of the National Executive Council, dated March 16, B.E. 2515 (1972). According to Thai law, children in the 12 to 15 age-group can be employed under certain prescribed circumstances.

However, as has been pointed out by experts, the existing laws have also overlooked a significant group of child workers who are engaged in agriculture or in domestic service.¹¹⁵

According to the latest Census taken in 1984, Thailand has a population of 50 million with a little over 20 million people under the age of 15 years. They thus represent about 40 per cent of the total population. In April 1983, ESCAP estimated that as many as 2 million children were working in unregistered and illegal factories.¹¹⁶ This is exactly double the figure given by the Thai government sources which claim that there are only 1.07 million children working in the age-group 11-14 years.¹¹⁷ Other sources however had different estimates. According to Mani Kanta:

"the Secretary of the National Economic and Social Development Board revealed in mid-1983 that children between the age of 11 and 14 were entering the labour market in numbers which increased by 6.1 per cent every year. In 1984, there were about 10.7 million working children in Thailand, approximately 88.8 per cent in the agricultural sector and 10.2 per cent in the industrial sector."¹¹⁸

A more recent report of Saisuree Chutikul¹¹⁹ which compares the figures on child labour of 1980 with 1982 draws the conclusion that:

"...the child labour force age 11-14 has increased from 21.35 per cent of the total population of this age-group in 1980 to 25.19 per cent in 1982..."

Patterns of Development

There are many causes of child labour in Thailand - many of them similar to those in India. The Thai economy is largely agrarian and 85 per cent of the population is dependent on agriculture. But the developmental efforts have been to industrialize. The result is that since the agrarian sector has been neglected for developmental purposes, Thai farmers are being continuously pauperized. Small land holdings, lack of investment capital and growing prices of machinery and fertilizers and the dwindling prices for farm produce in the world market have reduced the income of Thai farming households. According to Udomsakdi, 80 per cent of Thai farming households have an average debt of 4,000 bahts (U.S.\$148) per household.¹²⁰

Kanta explains that the earnings per day in the North-East are 4.6 bahts (U.S.\$0.17) per person per day, while in Bangkok a person can earn 64 to 66 bahts (U.S.\$2.42 - 2.49) per day. There is therefore a great difference in income between city and rural areas.¹²¹ This is coupled with an unprecedented industrial growth in the past two decades. Almost every National Economic and Social Development Plan has emphasized foreign investment and the development of the private sector. Kanta says:

"The focus has been on increasing national income rather than on distributing it. By the time the Fourth National Economic and Social Development Plan had been carried out, at the end of 1978, there were about 135,000 factories in the country. Among the new factories were many small establishments employing child labour... Employers preferred child labour because of the low wages, ease of control and the high productivity they made possible. The

investment required of employers of child labour was further reduced by the fact that it was not necessary to pay for welfare or benefits."¹²²

Recruiting Children

While obviously rural poverty is the main cause of child labour in Thailand, the role of vested interests cannot be under-estimated. Tim Bond, in a paper submitted to the UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights in 1982, had this to say:

"... it is not sufficient or realistic to isolate poverty as the only factor involved. Poverty, ... accounts for the existence of a willing labour force. But the other and equally important factor is the tremendous demand for children as workers in factories, restaurants and private houses, and as prostitutes in brothels. It is a fact that employers actually pay money to procure children, and that there are at least as many people in search of children as there are children in active search of work."¹²³

According to Russ Vallance:

"In Thailand, Anti-Slavery Society investigators estimated the number of full-time child workers at over four million and discovered a well-developed trafficking in the sale of children for work in Bangkok factories and brothels."¹²⁴

One of the most disturbing aspects of child labour in Thailand is the method of recruitment. Most of the working children in cities like Bangkok are procured through agents and employment agencies. These agents scour the countryside, and employment agencies at railway stations and bus-stops ensnare children before they have time to even get their bearings. Thus, there is virtually no contact between the employer and the parent, and there have been several cases when parents and children have completely lost touch

with each other. The children working in Thailand are by and large living with their employers and are completely at the mercy of these people.

Restructuring School

Both NGOs and government recognize that bad education in rural areas is made worse because the little schooling children get is not geared to answering the economic and social needs of the particular areas where they live. As Banerjee says, rural children are taught the same subjects as their counterparts in the urban areas.

This kind of education is meaningless for children who have to leave school early to help their parents in the fields and thus is a tremendous waste of the country's investment.¹²⁵ This has been recognized by the National Economic and Social Development Board of the Office of the Prime Minister, which noted that:

"the present educational system is not totally in tune with current social and economic realities and is not related to local needs and the requirements of the labour market...."¹²⁶

Tim Bond feels that the present formal educational system is totally irrelevant for the rural poor, whose children cannot get jobs later. Most children in the North East either do not attend school or else drop out in grade I to IV. The main reason is poverty, but another important factor is that parents recognize that primary education leads nowhere, particularly if they cannot afford to send their children on to high school. But says Bond:

"If poor children were able to learn at school, in addition to general subjects, something of practical use, based on the needs and employment opportunities of their environment, and if this could be followed up by more intensive training programmes for 13 to 16 year olds within the general educational

system... school attendance would rise sharply and... fewer young children would leave home to work in the big cities."¹²⁷

Vitit Muntharbhorn in a recent article in Nation makes several valuable suggestions to deal with the problem of child labour in Thailand.

According to him:

"Governments should ensure that free and compulsory education is available to all children. It should be facilitated by financial and other support for indigent cases. Alternative location for education, such as home and work site, may be explored to increase access for the poor."¹²⁸

Secondly, he suggests:

"within the formal schooling system, there should be more flexibility in terms of school terms and curriculum so that children can help parents meet livelihood needs without having to leave school."¹²⁹

Thirdly:

"Working children who need wages for their livelihood should be given education and facilities which combine the possibility for study and work."¹³⁰

And finally:

"Vocational, technical and non-formal education should be provided to children who find the formal schooling system inappropriate."¹³¹

Legal Literacy

Muntarbhorn has been actively involved in developing educational material for working children. He has developed educational games which explain the legal rights of children. He and his team made several attempts to teach children their legal rights but were thwarted by the employers. In Thailand, the

NGO efforts to help working children have concentrated on teaching children their legal rights as well as helping them seek redress. For many NGOs, child labour is a reality that is here to stay. Since they consider it as given, the efforts are to see how best these children can be helped. Some organizations help children learn basic facilities like the use of telephones, post offices, etc. Some organizations like Children's Rights' Protection Centre and the Centre of Concern for Child Labour use the print media - the newspaper - to let people know about their existence. This latter method has been very useful in making children and the public aware that such help is available. However, it assumes a basic level of literacy. Most children working in Thailand can read and write and therefore this kind of strategy can work there. And it has been suggested by many NGOs that people at the grassroots level should be educated about their rights under the labour laws. Many observers believe that the lack of opportunity for continuing education forces children to become child workers.¹³²

Compulsory Education

The main recommendation made by the various concerned departments dealing with child labour and education is that within the next Five-Year-Plan 1987-91, compulsory education should be increased from 4 to 6 years and the maximum age for school attendance should also be raised to 12 or 13 years. At the same time, the legal age for entering the work-force should also be raised from 11 to 13. Both the NGOs and the Thai government see a clear link between child labour and education. Some organizations have come out forcefully saying:

"If children younger than 15 do not work, they should be kept in school. Otherwise, problems with children who are not occupied either in school or at work could be worse than the problems of child labour. If a compulsory school system were forcefully implemented, there would be no children below this age sold to "factories" in the first place."¹³³

To summarize the Thai experience, one could say that there has been a considerable degree of success in bringing literacy and education to children in the age-group of 7 to 11, except in the North and North East. Compulsory education and child labour legislation are both aimed at children under 11. Children from the age of 12 upwards are permitted to work with certain restrictions, but the law itself leaves out important sectors from its ambit, such as agriculture, domestic service and prostitution. Child labour is growing annually at the rate of over 6 per cent and is concentrated in Bangkok and other major urban centres. The growing pressures of consumerism in a self-consciously industrializing society draw children into the work-force particularly from the relatively underdeveloped areas of the North and North East. While government policy is directed towards increasing the period of compulsory education, both the official view and that of NGOs is that child labour is there to stay for some time to come, and that children should be educated as to their rights under the labour law.

VI THE FEMALE WORKING CHILD

If the working child is denied education because he has to work, the plight of the female working child is even worse. The Indian Government's Seventh Plan document observes that:

"... nearly 73 per cent total non-enrolled children in the 6-11 year age-group were girls."¹³⁴

The all-India female literacy rate, according to the 1981 Census, is barely 24.8 per cent as against 46.9 per cent for males. In the post-independence period, the total number of illiterate women has increased from 161.9 million in 1951 to a staggering figure of 241.6 million in 1981.¹³⁵

By and large, gender disparities in literacy rates are greater in rural than in urban areas. In rural areas also, there are wide disparities and the female literacy rates range from 1.6 per cent in Jaisalmer district in Rajasthan to 79.0 per cent in the Kottayam district of Kerala. Amongst the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in certain rural areas, the female literacy rate is near zero.¹³⁶ The drop-out rate for girls is 68 per cent at the primary level and 77 per cent at the elementary stage.¹³⁷

Girls in all Asian societies take on the major burdens of domestic work like sweeping, swabbing, cooking, child-care, fetching firewood and water and tending animals.

Attitudes of Mothers to Daughters' Education

The report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector in India drew attention to the attitudes of parents - particularly mothers - to their daughters' education. In Rajasthan, this Commission met 215 women of which only four were literate and the women said quite frankly:

"We do not want to send our daughters to

school after 1st standard because they need to be trained for work."¹³⁸

The attitudes of mothers to their daughters getting an education is clear from interviews with mothers. Phoolbathi, a sweeper, told Karlekar:

"... nearly all our girls work as sweepers. Why should I waste my time and money sending my daughter to school where she will learn nothing of use...so why not put my girl to work so that she will learn something about our profession as well as be able to cook. My elder girl who is 15 years old will be married soon. Her mother-in-law will put her cleaning latrines somewhere. Too much schooling will only give girls big ideas and then they will be beaten up by their husbands or abused by their in-laws."¹³⁹

In state after state, the National Commission found that while women were willing to send their sons to school, that was not the case for their daughters. In Achbal in Kashmir, there was a meeting of 100 women and it was found that:

"While only 11 of their girls go to school, 150 of their boys attend."¹⁴⁰

Part of the problem of child labour is that when parents themselves do not get even minimum wages, they have no choice but to use their children. In the case of home-based workers, the vicious cycle continues.

"...where the child is a girl, (it) results in the child being prevented from going to school, leading to the inevitable cycle of no education, low skills and low earning capacity, thus perpetuating homework with its exploitatively low wages."¹⁴¹

In a study of working children in Bangalore city, it was found that a larger number of girls are sent to earn an income while boys more often than not go to work partly at least to learn the trade.¹⁴²

An interesting finding was that of Leela Gulati in a study of child labour in the coir industry of Kerala, where she found that while the proportion of illiterates is higher amongst girls than boys, the percentage of school drop-outs is higher among boys than girls. Says Gulati:

"This can be taken to mean that a larger proportion of working girls than boys do not get sent to school at all but, of the girls who start school, the proportion of those who drop out works out to be less than the proportion of boys."¹⁴³

Malavika Karlekar writes that in a Bombay slum, illiteracy was three times as high among the women and girls than among the men. Women in migrant settlements in Delhi were prepared to send their daughters for a few years to primary school, but wanted their sons to finish school. The author noted that while:

"...parents tended to have unrealistic educational and employment aspirations for their sons... they did not consider education very important for their daughters."¹⁴⁴

B.G. Sudha and Smita Tewari in a study of child labour in 2 villages in Karnataka State found:

"the most interesting fact that emerged from the above analysis is that the boys were more keen on earning, whereas the girls were interested in studying. The girls did not want to study beyond the high school, whereas those boys who were interested wanted to go for higher education."¹⁴⁵

Malavika Karlekar, in her study of sweeper women in Delhi, found that:

"Of the entire sample, there were only four girls who were studying beyond Class VIII and two happened to be the daughters of two clerks. Further, six mothers admitted that

while they had sent out their young daughters to be sweepers, their sons were still in school."¹⁴⁶

Says Karlekar:

"If most mothers were somewhat motivated to keep their sons in school, far fewer were so inclined for their daughters. Apart from the opportunity cost argument, women accepted the conventional sex stereotypes for their daughters. In addition, they were pessimistic about the chances of their daughters' achieving occupational or social mobility through education."¹⁴⁷

Mothers' Work and Girl Children

In case study after case study it is found that female children are denied the right to education. In the case of beedi (local cigarettes) workers, it was found that:

"In most places these days, it is customary for even the poorest to at least enrol their children in school, even if they are sent to school only when there is no work to be done at home. But Sanghatana activists did not find a single (female) child of a beedi worker attending school. They stay at home to do the work their mothers cannot do. And once they are sufficiently grown up, they go to the factory to 'help' their mothers. It is true that the... Act prohibits child labour (section 24), but if children insist on filially helping their mothers, what can the poor seth^{*} do? And if, in the process, the seth also acquires well-trained new recruits, whose training pays for itself, is he to be blamed?"¹⁴⁸

The situation is similar in other Asian countries. In Malaysia, Ah-Eng Lai writes that while more boys go out to work and girls work at home

* Small local business man

"in the case of the boys, the acquisition of skills, no matter how limited, is associated with their apprenticeship, while for the girls, their jobs are not similarly associated with skills-training."¹⁴⁹

In the tea plantations of Sri Lanka, a woman's workday starts at dawn and ends at nightfall and children are the only asset she has to lessen her burden. Tea pluckers told researchers that:

"...married life with growing (female) children to help them is much easier than life as young unmarried women. Girls are expected to do most of the housework..."¹⁵⁰

The girls become workers on the estates earlier than boys and it is they who have to forgo schooling from the beginning.¹⁵¹ In the sample of 50 girls, 18 had never attended school and 14 had been sent away as domestic servants. The others had so little education when they started working that they soon lapsed into illiteracy.¹⁵²

Gender Differentials

In the Philippines, a study ¹⁵³ found that there are more girls below 10 years of age working than boys. As in the case of India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, in the Philippines also girls worked as wage workers as well as domestic workers.¹⁵⁴ In most cases, there is rigid sexual division of labour and women are forced to do wage work and housework. And the only way this can be done is by using female children. Thus, what Leela Gulati says about the Indian situation would apply also to other countries in the region where there is discrimination between male and female children. She says:

"In my studies I found that (a) boys stayed longer in schools than girls; (b) boys were not expected to do virtually any household chores; (c) boys were allowed much greater freedom to spend whatever wages they earned; and (d) boys got relatively better food in

terms of claim to rice against tapioca.

On the other hand, I observed that (a) a girl has to do all the supporting household chores even when she goes to school; (b) she is withdrawn from school when she is needed full time in the house; and (c) she has to contribute most of what she earns to the house when she goes out to work.

Possibly, the reasons for this attitude on the part of the women are that (a) they hope to be looked after by their sons in their old age; (b) while the sons bring in a dowry, the daughters are a liability; and (c) a son can hope to move into a better-paid skilled, and sometimes possibly a regular, permanent job, whereas the daughter will work all her life for a low wage and be hard up."155

There are many problems with the education of girls. Some of them relate to the inadequate number of separate schools, availability of schools, shortage of women teachers in the rural areas, early marriage among girls, social beliefs that education must be linked to employment opportunities and since these are not available to girls, education is not necessary for them, and the social status of women. More effort needs to be put into making parents aware that children of both sexes are equal. With respect to gender disparities, community participation is crucial in generating awareness about the importance of girls' education.

The clear differential between the level of literacy as between boys and girls has several important implications. The most immediate result is that the universalization of primary education will remain a distant dream when half the child population is treated in discriminatory fashion. In many Asian societies, the work that girl children do has some common features: a large part of it has to do with domestic chores and the maintenance of the household and this is not normally recognized as 'work'. The

contribution of girl children in assisting their mothers in home-based industry goes similarly unrecognized; the work that girl children do is generally of an unskilled nature and thereby confirms low status upon them; their lack of skills and training effectively blocks avenues of upward mobility. The gender-typing of work and the gender typing of role interact upon each other and perpetuate an already unjust situation in which girls receive less education and nutrition within the family, are married at early ages and, because of low skill levels, cannot improve their own lot. In turn, they will enlist the aid of their female children in the struggle for survival.

VII SOME INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES

Most governmental and non-governmental agencies in the Asian region have reconciled themselves to the idea that children have to work for the foreseeable future. Free, compulsory, stipendiary, primary education is seen as a distant dream. The universalization of primary education is not close to realization. Most governments claim to have very high enrolment rates, but their drop-out rates are also high. In some countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, a large number of children combine work and schooling. But by and large it is taken for granted that in the near future, it is not possible to eliminate child labour and provide education. With the failure of governments to ban child labour and reach primary education for all, many NGOs, taking this fact as given, have developed innovative strategies for bringing education to working children. In this section, we will describe some of these ideas in detail.

The Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (India)

The Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER) based in Calcutta, West Bengal (India), is a voluntary agency which started its work in 1983. The main aim of this project is to give education, at least up to the primary stage, to working children in the city. They also provide health care through regular medical check-ups and treat ailing child workers.

The approach of IPER has been somewhat different from that of others. They did not attempt to set up evening or night schools as is usually the practice because they did not think that it was fair to do so since most children work 10 - 14 hours a day. They therefore developed the notion of a holiday school based on the Sunday School concept in Europe and the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries for children who could not attend regular school.¹⁵⁶

In the first phase of the project, they set up 12 holiday schools and later added another 24.

There are about 50 to 55 children enrolled in each holiday school. The total number of children involved is about 2,000.

The IPER holiday schools run on the week-ends - on Saturdays for two hours from 3.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. and on Sundays for four hours from 8.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon. The method of teaching in these schools is somewhat different from that of normal primary schools which hold classes for 180 to 200 days a year. The holiday schools have not more than 100 teaching days in a year. In order to see that children do not lose out, they have adopted two special procedures: individualized lessons and home teaching programmes for two additional days in the week. The course work assigned for a particular grade or class is divided into printed one-day lessons. These individualized lessons are drawn up for each of the subjects which are usually taught at the primary level, such as language, arithmetic, nature study, history and geography. These lessons usually have two parts, exposition and testing. The child is first explained the subject and later he is tested on the subject matter.

During the week, there is a home-teaching programme, and this is a crucial part of the educational scheme. The teacher visits each child worker at home or at work, in the morning or evening depending on the child's convenience, and assists him understand the lessons well. This helps to accelerate the progress of the child. Another direct benefit of this is a psychological one: the teacher develops a bond with the child and his family and this is of use in overcoming the deep sense of inferiority that such children suffer from. At present, these schools attempt to use the same curricula as that of children in primary schools.

The IPER project also provides the child worker with free books, slates, pencils, exercise books and other educational aids. The holiday schools also arrange for visits to the zoo and the local museums, etc. They also have sit-and-draw competitions amongst children and this is considered one of the most enjoyable activities.

One measure of success is the willingness of the children to attend school and an evaluation of the project showed that almost 80 per cent of the children come to the school for more than 40 per cent of the total school days. At least 25 per cent of the children had 80 per cent attendance. IPER found that more than 70 per cent of the child workers were totally illiterate even though primary education was free in the State. The remaining 30 per cent, who had had some education, had lapsed into illiteracy very quickly.¹⁵⁷

Over 95 per cent of the children said that they did not want to leave school. But 5 per cent of the children were happy at being out of school and had no intention of going back.¹⁵⁸

The IPER programme, by all accounts, has been very successful because it has integrated the needs of the child to work and study. Its health component is an additional bonus of the project. The IPER programme does not make any attempt to provide vocational training. Their emphasis is on raising the educational level of working children and bringing it to par with that of non-working children. This approach gives the children the opportunity at a later stage of getting into the regular school system and perhaps breaking out of his current drudgery. It provides real avenues for upward mobility in the mainstream society.

Self-Employed Women's Association (India)

Another project in India has been undertaken by SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association, for female children in the city of Ahmedabad, in the State of Gujarat. They have taken up three groups of children - those who do chindi work (patch-work), paper-pickers and cart-pullers.

The patch-work stitching is usually done by young girls and women in the inner city of Ahmedabad. Girls in the age-range of 8 to 16 do the work. Younger

girls do the pre-stitching work. The paper-picking children usually accompany their mothers carrying a heavy sack on their back and walk 8 to 10 kilometres a day. Cart-pulling is one of the few jobs where girls do heavy manual work : loading, unloading, and even pulling a cart.

SEWA's child labour projects were aimed at training girls from these three occupations in trades other than those of their parents so that they could improve their earning capacities. The paper-picker girls were trained in electrical wiring and printed circuit board (PCB) assembling, the patch-work girls were taught weaving and the cart-puller girls were taught sewing.¹⁵⁹

The three groups of girls were from different educational backgrounds. The paper-picker girls were better educated and had attended school. They were taught English and Hindi. The patch-work girls (mainly Muslims) were also attending school, but had only studied Urdu, and so they were taught Gujarati. The cart-puller girls were totally illiterate and were taught basic literacy.

The children who were given training at three centres were also given 200 ml. of milk every day. Their educational programme included health education and recreation. The trainees were paid Rs.3 a day as a stipend.

The Rehabilitation of Child Labour Project run by SEWA is more than three years old. Recently, SEWA had an evaluation done of their project to see what the skills learnt by the trainees were and what could be the future plan of action.

The number of girls in the stitching centres was around 24. While the girls learnt the rudiments of sewing, it was found that, except for 3, none of them owned a sewing machine at home, and so were completely dependent on the two machines available in the centre. There was so much demand for machines that the girls did not get a chance to use their newly acquired skills. But the other objectives of teaching

basic literacy and health education and providing supplementary nutrition and recreation were fulfilled.

The weaving centre had a strength of 25 girls who were taught how to weave mats, towels, curtain cloth and so on. The problem, however, was that looms require space and large investment. Both were not available to the trainees. The result was that more than half the girls who had acquired new skills could not use them and this led to a lot of frustration. SEWA is now in the process of buying a place and setting up a weaving centre.¹⁶⁰ The third centre was the electrical and PCB centre. Here they were taught electrical wiring but this was discontinued because it was felt that it was a risky venture to send young girls to unknown places and therefore printed circuit board assembly work was taken up. The girls learnt to fit and repair fans, switches, regulators, etc.

This was one activity that did produce results and during Diwali, the festival of lights, the girls did good business by making and selling torans or decorative panels for front doors, which they made from bulbs. But no real headway was made here either.

The SEWA experiment has been described in detail primarily to show the kind of unforeseen hurdles that can come in the way of a potentially good programme. SEWA has, unlike a lot of agencies, honestly evaluated their own programme and admitted their short-falls. They have suggested that technical schools be set up where the trainees could be taught different trades from the very beginning as well as entrepreneurship development. They have suggested that the technical schools be training and production centres and from the proceeds of the sales, the schools could be maintained.¹⁶¹

Chetna Vikas (India)

Another innovative strategy, quite different from the two described earlier, is that offered by Chetna Vikas, a voluntary agency which operates in 35 villages of Wardha district in Maharashtra, India. Some of their activities include running creches, day-care centres for children, adult and popular education and earn-and-learn centres.

Chetna Vikas conducted a survey in these 35 villages and found that there were a number of illiterate children in the 10-15 age-group who were working. They felt that they could not think of a schooling project for these children unless it was linked with income generation. Chetna Vikas also found that the children were unemployed for about 3 or 5 months in the year and hand-spinning and tailoring were potentially viable activities for them.

The project thus aimed at children in the 10 to 15 age-group, who had either not attended school at all or had dropped out mid-way. The emphasis was to enrol more girls so as to bring them into the mainstream. The main emphasis of this programme was to be on earning and learning, developing new skills like tailoring and spinning which later could assure them of regular wages.

The centres started functioning in 1983 in three villages with a total enrolment of 85 children - most of them girls, who were involved in domestic work, livestock-rearing and agriculture and who earned between Rs.3 and Rs.4 a day. The project hoped that the children would reach the 4th standard of the formal system of schooling within 2 to 2½ years but their teaching methodology was very different. The curriculum they developed included subjects like agriculture and health and there was a big component of art and crafts. Emphasis was also placed on discussing women's status in society.

The staff of these centres were carefully selected so that they belonged to the same villages as the children. Preference was given to female teachers as the students were largely girls. The teacher had to be a trained person with knowledge of tailoring as well. These teachers, although some were from outside, were given an initial ten-day training.

The curriculum for these schools had all the subjects taught in the formal system such as Marathi, the mother tongue of the children, mathematics, science, geography,

history and civics.

Ashok Bang, writing about Chetna Vikas, says that while the original intention was to give children some kind of productive activity like spinning for which they were paid Rs.2, it was felt later that this was uneconomical. Now more and more children come for 3 hours a day without disturbing their working and wage-earning patterns. Says Bang:

"Since 1984, there have been more girls than boys. The drop-out rate was about 30%, reasons being related mainly to household duties and contract labour. The annual evaluation showed that more than half the children could read fluently and nearly two-thirds could take dictation and copy down written texts. In arithmetic, formal school levels of proficiency were attained, although not uniformly by all for the same standard. The tailoring output was good and marketable. The biggest constraint was the quality of teachers, which meant continuous attention to teacher training even to attain moderate results...Overall, there has been sufficient positive results for the scheme to be continued and expanded."162

The Indian Institute of Education

The Indian Institute of Education, Pune, India, has a project of developing non-formal, part-time primary education for out-of-school rural children in the 9 to 14 age-group. The idea was to develop a suitable curriculum, produce relevant teaching material and evolve materials, techniques and forms of organization for training teachers in non-formal primary education. Another objective of this project was to create a community-based system for planning, organizing, monitoring, supervising and evaluating non-formal primary education. The project has trained Village Educational Committees to help organize and supervise the classes and since local primary teachers were unwilling to participate in evening classes, as more of them did not live close by, the villagers

agreed to draw upon non-professional resources from within the community. Panels of possible voluntary teachers were also prepared. These recruits were trained by the project staff. During the project period of 5 years, 375 local recruits were trained. Of these, 263 actually conducted classes which were organized in three batches lasting two years each. Most of the teachers had a secondary education and 30 had studied between one and three years beyond the secondary school certificates. All the teachers worked full-time during the day.

The prescribed school curriculum was adopted for the non-formal classes and new subjects like history, geography, health, education and science were integrated together under 'human environment and human affairs'. Languages and mathematics are linked with the pupils' days-to-day transactions and experiences. The emphasis is on developing cultural, social and aesthetic sensitivity through stories and songs which were composed specially for the project.

The project first undertook a base-line survey to identify potential candidates. The total enrolment was 4,332 children, of which 1,095 were boys and 3,237 were girls. The children were engaged in a variety of occupations like cattle-herding, household work, child care, agricultural labour and 15 boys were even working as bonded labourers.

About 24 per cent of the children dropped out of the project. While most of them did so because they got married or their families migrated, some of them were too shy to attend classes; in some cases, the parents were not keen; in others, there were domestic responsibilities or the distance from the house to the place of work was too great. Very few, 189 out of 4,332 dropped out because they did not enjoy the programme or their parents felt it was not a worthwhile project.

Anil bordia, the Education Secretary to the Government of India, writing about this project has this to say:

"The project found both children and parents

to be enthusiastic about education. Response to the non-formal classes was excellent, especially since they were organized to fit in with working children's routine and to satisfy their fundamental need for play and learning. In formal schooling, children suffer from stress as a result of the overpowering authority of the teacher and the fear of examination. The project introduced a more informal teacher/pupil relationship and mutual trust and adopted a process of continuous self-evaluation by the pupils and periodic skills-evaluation through competitions."¹⁶³

This project experiment has been useful in that it brought out the lacunae in the prescribed primary school curriculum. The emphasis in the project is on grasping concepts rather than on acquiring information. Instead of learning by rote and examination, this non-formal education system emphasized self-teaching. But the system is flexible enough to allow those children who want to sit for regular examinations to do so by studying the prescribed textbooks.¹⁶⁴

A Project in Madhya Pradesh (India)

Yet another innovative project in India is to be found in Madhya Pradesh where the government has incorporated a programme of "earning and learning" into the school curriculum. During craft periods, children make floor mats, chalk, school furniture, sealing wax and school uniforms - items that the Department of Education needs. The children were paid cash as the goods were made. Built into the project were incentives for craft teachers so that when goods worth Rs.15,000 were made, the teacher was given Rs.300. This craft period was voluntary and children could also do this work in their free periods.¹⁶⁵

Indian Institute of rural workers

Another project of non-formal education for

working children is provided by the Indian Institute of Rural Workers, Aurangabad, India. This voluntary agency aims at rehabilitating working children who have been withdrawn from work and providing them with basic education, nutrition, health care and vocational training. This organization covers 60 to 80 children who have been withdrawn from exploitative work by giving them a cash stipend for the partial loss of income.

The Institute gives priority to children from the socially and economically disadvantaged rural communities. These children are given a midday meal, safe drinking water, clothing and periodical medical examinations at a special centre.

At the Institute, vocational training is given to children in horticulture, forestry, dairy farming, construction, leather work, chalk and doll-making, basket-weaving, painting, drawing, tailoring, embroidery, spinning and domestic electrical wiring. Functional literacy and non-formal education are provided along with recreational and sports facilities. Once the children are trained, they are helped with loans and placed in suitable occupations. Most of those children belong to the nearby villages where they were engaged in stone-crushing, mining and construction work. Although the total number of children doing this work in the project area is 450, this Institute tries to cover about 15 per cent of this population, which consists of children in the age-range of 7 to 13 years and who are all school drop-outs.

Ashok Narayan of the Ministry of Labour, writing about this programme, says that although 100 children are registered, about 60 attend regularly. While children in the regular schools reach class IV in two years, the children at the Institute complete the course in one and a half. Out of the 45 children who appeared for the examination, all passed. The training in skills provided by the Institute has been useful in that many children are earning good wages in employments for which they received training at the Institute.

The biggest problem has been that of drop-outs which could be due to the children's economic background and the low stipend offered. It was also felt that as an industrial complex was being developed close to the Institute and the contractors offered children higher wages than the stipend given to the trainees, this could be a cause of drop-out.¹⁶⁶

Mobile School (Thailand)

Innovative strategies are being tried out in many countries in the Asian region. Thailand has a unique Mobile School Project in the slums of Bangkok, run by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. A large number of children in the slums cannot be enrolled in school because they do not have the necessary documents. The mobile school provides primary education which is the same as that of regular schools. Non-formal education is also given to children between the ages of 8 and 15 along with school lunch, free uniforms and educational aids.¹⁶⁷

On-the-Job Training (Malaysia)

In Malaysia, Unesco has an on-the-job training programme under the educational innovations scheme. This scheme started with 120 unemployed youth, who were recruited to become parking attendants. These boys were given 8 to 16 hours a week practical training after work in subjects like basic electrical work, building and construction, refrigeration and air-conditioning work, drafting and steno-typing, etc.¹⁶⁸

The Under-Privileged Children's Educational Programme (Bangladesh)

The Under-Privileged Children's Educational Programme (UCEP) was started in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1972 for street and working children who did not have any hope of receiving an education and were destined to become illiterate. The UCEP was initiated for 400 children in Dhaka. It was estimated that the membership would go up to 14,000 children by 1984 in other areas of Bangladesh - Chittagong and Khulna. The UCEP also covered more than 2,000 children in

the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal.

The UCEP covers children in the age-range of 10 to 12 years but in case of drop-outs, older children are also taken in. Admissions are open twice a year, in June and December. Most of the new children start school in Class I, although newly recruited drop-outs enter the appropriate higher classes.¹⁶⁹

There are certain basic requirements that have to be met. firstly, a child is admitted only if he is a working child. Secondly, both his parents and his employers must agree to letting the child attend school. The reasons why these conditions are made are that the child's wages may come down and the parents must agree to it and the child may also need to take time off to attend classes, and so the employers' concurrence is essential.

From the very beginning, UCEP takes the initiative and identifies the working children and then continues to be in touch with the parents and employers.

The infrastructure to run the school is provided, at least in part, by government, local authorities and community committees. They are usually located in or near the city areas where there are concentrations of working boys and several shifts are run throughout the day so that children can attend school at their convenience. Each shift is for two hours at the primary/local secondary schools and three or four hours in the technical schools. The children manage to do two grades in a year. Because they are 'highly motivated', they attend school for more than 290 days a year, and each class is small with a limit of 25 children per teacher.

In the normal course, lower secondary schooling ends at the end of Class 8 in Bangladesh and Class 7 in Nepal. Most of the children finish this in four or three and a half years respectively. Those who reach this level enter the UCEP technical schools which are the focal point of each project. In these technical schools, training is offered in a particular

trade. There are eight different trades to choose from. According to the UCEP brochure, for which children whose families own small plots of land, and who want to become farmers, training is given in agriculture in the agricultural schools. The boys who have completed their lower secondary education in UCEP urban schools become full-time students and learn how to make the most productive use of village-size land holdings and how to maintain and repair agricultural machinery. They are expected to pass on their knowledge to others in the village.

A major component of the school curriculum is hygiene, nutrition education, how to operate bank accounts, simple book-keeping and basic business management. The schooling, technical training and educational materials are given free and boys who attend the project technical schools also get scholarships. In addition, the students can buy subsidized meals which are prepared in the project kitchens and clothes which are stitched in the tailoring workshops. Even medical facilities are available to all at minimal charges.

There are hostel facilities for children who can prove that they are destitute but they have to pay for this facility. This of course means that they continue to work. The UCEP also has a good network with the police departments so that street children who get into trouble on charges of vagrancy are brought by the police to the social workers who take responsibility for them.

UCEP also helps the children who want to set up their own workshops by lending them money. The capital, plus a 10 per cent service charge, has to be paid within two years. So far, the project has had no difficulty in recovering the loans.

There is another scheme run by the UCEP in Bangladesh where every year a special examination is held for students in classes 5 and 6 in Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna. The boy who gets the highest marks is sent to a foster home run in Dhaka so that he can become a full-time student in a good government

high school. He is helped even to enter University. This project is to be replicated in Nepal.

VIII CONCLUSION

One finding of this study, already mentioned in the introductory section, relates to the veracity of facts and figures in both the areas of child labour and education. If there is an in-built proclivity to under-estimate the extent of child labour, it is matched by the tendency to over-estimate the numbers of children educated. Both trends are unhealthy for they fail to reflect what is happening on the ground. A critical awareness and a hard-headed appraisal of data help put matters in perspective. The assessment of the size of the problem in the case of child labour is further complicated by the variety of possible definitions: in some countries, where they are narrow and restrictive, important segments of child populations are left out. It is necessary to reiterate these observations not out of a fetish for numbers, but from the point of view of approximating reality as closely as possible.

The record of achievement in the field of education in South Asia is not impressive except in the cases of Thailand and Sri Lanka. Inadequate investment in primary education leads to an inadequate infrastructure: where there are no schools or the school is too far from the home, the question of getting an education simply does not arise. Even if there are schools nearby, the absence of teachers or the system of single-teacher schools who, when present, teach several grades together, makes a mockery of the content and quality of education. Since the educational schedule does not match the agricultural calendar, rural children have to miss school during peaks of agricultural activity. The single-point, single-entry sequential pattern of schooling does not allow for any flexibility and so children who miss the bus in the beginning cannot board it again. Across the Asian region, expert after expert has called for curricula and training relevant to the context and situation of the local child. Girl children are everywhere worse off than their brothers, except

possibly in Thailand. Compulsory education has not been accepted by and large as a national goal.

Laws regarding child labour, where they exist, have several loop-holes and leave out large chunks of child populations from their ambit. Even where the law is progressive, the enforcement machinery is weak and prosecutions few and far between. Unfortunately, policy-makers generally see child labour as a 'harsh reality', the solution to which lies only in the elimination of poverty. When the labour of children is considered inevitable for a long time to come, it inhibits both legislative response and programmatic action.

Where, then, do the streams of child labour and education meet? It is the argument of this digest that their confluence lies in those groups which are marginalized, and examples of these are to be found in every society. In India, working children are largely illiterate as study after study demonstrates: they belong to rural landless households and, more often than not, are members of the Scheduled Castes or other disadvantaged communities. In Malaysia, those of Chinese ethnic origin or children of Tamil labour on the oil palm and rubber estates can be identified as amongst the worst-off. The children employed in the Philippines in the Muro-Ami fishing operations are engaged in the most hazardous of tasks in which mortality is high. In Sri Lanka, children working in the fishing and gem industries as well as the children of Tamil labour on the tea estates remain unaffected by the general progress on the educational front and, in Thailand, children from the North and North-East, where the hill tribes live, end up working for a pittance in Bangkok and other urban centres. In all the cases cited above, the levels of literacy and education have been shown to be demonstrably less than those of their peers, even though those levels themselves are not particularly high. Blue-prints for bringing education to working children must take up these groups on priority.

Another major argument of this digest has been that the maintenance of illiteracy and the perpetuation of poverty have not been accidental in those sections

of the child population which are forced to learn a living at the expense of their education. Powerful vested interests - whether in semi-feudal agriculture or unorganized industry - continue their stranglehold of exploitation by actively recruiting child labour in a perpetual quest for profit. Often, whole families are ensnared in the net of these powers: small consumption loans, unfair systems of payment, bondedness and ruthless suppression of voices of protest are common features of these worst-case examples. Hosts of middlemen prosper in the use, sale and purchase of children. For such children, education is kept away by design in certain areas for certain communities, thus ensuring a compliant and submissive labour force. the liberating potential of education is well-recognized and hence forestalled. Patterns of development that neglect equity and social justice only serve to further entrench the vested interests. Public awareness and the intervention of the State can help right some of these ills.

Micro-study after micro-study in different Asian societies has tellingly made the point that both parents and working children themselves hold education as one of their deepest aspirations for it is the only window to a better future. Even if there is no guarantee that education will lead to better life-chances, it is at the very least a necessary condition. In spite of all the ills of school systems, they are not 'meaningless' for the children of the poor, as some education professionals would have us believe. Enmeshed as they are in a web of poverty, exploitation and vested interests, these children sell their labour only to help themselves and their families survive. They do not stay out of school by an act of choice.¹⁷⁰

Myron Weiner has looked at the historical experiences of different societies with respect to the introduction of compulsory education. Of the many impetuses for change, he identifies the enforcement of compulsory education as a major instrument for the eradication of child labour. As he shows, different societies have introduced compulsory education at different times in diverse historical circumstances. The importance of his findings lies in his questioning

of the traditional view that compulsory education and the consequent eradication of child labour are possible only after a society has reached a certain stage of industrial development.¹⁷¹

The innovative strategies of different groups in the region to bring education to working children have been described since they could be possible models to be replicated elsewhere. But in the last analysis, all the steps that need to be taken to achieve the goal of universalization of primary education, such as the creation of an adequate educational infrastructure, the provision of adequate budgets for free schooling, mid-day meals, uniforms, books, etc., and appropriate labour laws and enforcement machinery can only be taken by the State.

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